

KINGDOM VALUES

CHARACTER > CHAOS

TONY EVANS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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CHARACTER OVER CHAOS

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PART ONE

**THE FOUNDATION
OF BIBLICAL
CHARACTER**

WHAT IS TRUTH?

I can't breathe.

It's a statement we have all heard over the past few years. It appears on shirts, signs, hats, and in a number of other places. I'm sure you know its origins as it relates to the wrongful death of George Floyd at the knee of a policeman. But since that time, the statement has taken on a life of its own. It symbolizes a need for justice. It speaks to equality. It resounds with the hope of reforming broken systems in a broken world. It also reminds us of the stranglehold injustice can have on anyone who comes within its grip.

This statement has impacted us not only nationally, but globally. It has become personal to many of us as we have heard it said by loved ones or friends in an entirely different context: Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions have lost their lives because of an inability to breathe. Many people have experienced the powerlessness of not being able to help their loved one breathe. Gasping for air and being placed on oxygen or on a ventilator have become all-too-familiar occurrences—whether experienced firsthand or through another's retelling of the horrors of this virus that ravages the lungs.

Yet, despite the difficulties and death all around us, you and I are living in a day when we have gathered to collectively watch yet another potential demise. Huddled in a small room barely big enough for all of us to sit or stand in, we stare as truth appears to draw its final breaths. We watch as, with each gasping inhale and struggling exhale, truth's strength diminishes before our very eyes.

Truth, which used to be a solid pillar in many people's lives, lies there on a makeshift hospital bed, a mere skeleton of its former self. Hollowed jaws and protruding bones remind us of where vibrant life used to be. We watch, waiting. Wondering if truth will somehow pull through.

After all, our culture has already proclaimed that truth is dead. Our culture has already ripped off the life support and walked out of the room. Our culture has washed its hands and said good-bye to that which used to guard our land. Our culture has effectively sought to remove the remaining safeguard preventing us from falling into an abyss of chaos and confusion.

Not only would the actual death of truth usher in greater calamity, but the process of truth's dying over the last decades has already led to a breakdown in the cultural immune system of our entire world. The starvation that has taken place in the organs and lifeblood of humanity is immense. Without truth flowing freely through the arteries of civilization, as oxygen flows through the arteries of a body, the organs that sustain order are shutting down. They are collapsing and can no longer provide what our society needs to function in a productive and healthy way.

Not much remains of honor, honesty, or character in our culture as we watch the ongoing plans for truth to not only be buried but also funeralized before us. Somewhere along the line, we have forgotten that truth matters. We have forgotten that we depend on truth far more than we realize. We have forgotten that objective standards govern much of what we choose to do; they don't govern just our values. Without truth, the whole world would collapse. Even the opponents of truth depend on it to function every day.

For example, how would you feel about flying on an airplane with an unsure pilot? If you heard your pilot come on the speaker before the flight and say, “We are about to take off, and I’m pretty sure I know what buttons to push to operate the plane properly, but sometimes I just like to mix it up,” what would you do? If you are like me, you would get off that plane.

Or how would you feel about a surgeon who has discarded truth in his or her field? Let’s say you were having a consultation with a surgeon and he or she said, “I watched a surgery like this the other day online and that surgeon was doing some pretty cool new things that I’d like to try to save time. I think I know just where to cut.” Would you even stay for the rest of the consultation, or would you, like me, get up and walk away?

What about a pharmacist who admits to guessing about the accuracy of the dosage as your medication is put in the bottle? Would you take it? Or what if the pharmacist said, “I have a lot of meds to choose from on these shelves. Never mind what the doctor prescribed—let me pick one that I feel is right for you!”

THE FALLACY OF FEELINGS

Not long ago, I watched the Cowboys play the Eagles on Monday Night Football. One of the scoring plays Dak Prescott attempted involved his running a quarterback sneak into the end zone. It was not evident by watching it in real time whether he made it in. So the referees did what they’ve been trained to do. They went to the sidelines to review the film.

After they showed the play from various camera angles, it quickly became evident to all of us watching that there really was no definitive angle that showed whether he got into the end zone. Usually that means the referees will stick with the initial call—in this case, that he did not get into the end zone. But something struck me as I watched the game. One of the announcers for ESPN who is known for his experience in football said that it “felt” like Dak got in. He

kept emphasizing that it just “felt” as though he scored, based on seeing the lunges of the players and the pack.

It seemed like an odd thing for an announcer to say, especially since this announcer was the one dedicated to speaking about contested referee decisions. That’s when the other commentator asked him if a referee is supposed to overturn a call because of how he feels. The announcer who had emphasized feeling laughed and admitted that no, the referee should not. A call is to be overturned only when there is clear, undisputed visual confirmation that it should be overturned.

Too much of our culture today is operating on the same basis the announcer did in wanting that call overturned. Decisions are being made based on feelings. Truth is being redefined based on feelings. Cultural norms are being established based on feelings. And while that is dangerous in and of itself, it gets even more dangerous when we realize that feelings change. They can turn on a dime. Not only that, but feelings usually differ based on who you are and what perspective you have.

I have no doubt that the Cowboys fans all felt that Dak got in the end zone as they watched the replay angles. I also have no doubt that the Eagles fans felt as though Dak didn’t. Any time you base your values, beliefs, and decisions on feelings, you are no longer basing them on the truth.

If I were to guess, you wouldn’t fly on the plane, yield to the surgeon, or trust the pharmacist in my earlier examples, because when it comes to your life and health, you want people who know the truth and function based on it. You don’t want people who are haggling or hustling. You want the truth. And yet, despite truth’s importance in so many ways, we are living in a day when truth is dying all around us. Everything has been left to be defined by emotions, manipulation, propaganda, or agendas, which has led to cataclysmic confusion and chaos in myriad realms.

For starters, we are witnessing psychological chaos all around us. People’s mental trajectory has gone astray because truth no

longer serves as a baseline for the mind. We also see philosophical chaos as individuals and scholars doodle with ideas and theories ad nauseam. Scripture calls this ever learning yet never coming to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7). People collect information today like they used to collect trading cards or limited-edition Beanie Babies. It's amazing to me how people see a need to compile degree upon degree and yet often do not appear any brighter than when they began pursuing formal education. This is because they have often garnered these degrees at the graveyard of truth.

There is also scientific chaos as people deal with probabilities and possibilities only to discover that scientists seem to change their minds as frequently as the wind changes direction. Whether due to the discovery of new information or to different interpretations of existing data, rules based on science frequently have come across as nothing more than suggestions based on uncertainties. One year it is healthy to drink coffee; the next year it is not. One year it is healthy to eat bread, and the next it is not. These are mildly exaggerated examples, as I'm sure you are aware of the more personally impacting and life-influencing continual changes in science recently.

The continual changes, or even contradictory interpretations that can vary state by state, in our nation over the last few years have raised red flags for many of us. At times it even appears that rather than scientists defining themselves as “discoverers of truth,” many have made the leap to seeking to be “determiners of truth”—even when that means reversing their own determinations quickly and frequently. This has led to division, chaos, confusion, and an overall hesitation in our culture to do what we have been asked to do—trust the science.

We are facing chaos in entertainment now too. Talk shows used to offer platforms for debating the topics of the day, but we now have nothing more than “babble by the hour.” Confused people talk about confused ideals often rooted in one-sided perspectives, which then leads to an even more confused audience. There is no lack of opinions today, and it can be hard to distinguish who is telling the

truth, whom you should believe, whom it is wise to follow, and from whom you need to learn. This leads to a cycle of friending and being friended, or unfriending and being unfriended, following and being followed, et cetera, based on what people say or don't say due to delusions about what is truth.

In addition to the mayhem in psychology, science, and entertainment, though, is the greatest cause of confusion in our land today: the existence of spiritual chaos. We now have crickets in the pulpit. Or we have a multitude of chirping. Or shouting. Or tickling of the ears. But what we don't have is clarity. What we don't have is truth. The one thing that ought to distinguish the Christian influencer or pastor, as well as the church of Jesus Christ, is that we are people of truth. We are people who take the concept of truth seriously. And yet even within much of the church today, truth has left the building.

Thus, when I set out to write a book on what our nation needs most right now—a return to Christian character and kingdom values—I realized I needed to start at the foundation where values are formed. Without a foundation of truth, character and values

**Without a
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as much weight
and consistency
as the wind.**

carry about as much weight and consistency as that wind I mentioned earlier. Change the definition of the truth, and by default, you'll have to change the values assigned to it, or rising from it. That's why the first part of this book will look at what truth is, where we find it, how we use it, and the ways we apply it. Truth is the foundation of character. Then, after we have studied truth and we

understand its importance in our lives, the second part of the book will focus on the core kingdom values Jesus taught His disciples while seated on a mountainside I visited not too long ago, right next to the Sea of Galilee.

I'll never forget the first time I stood on this mountainside where Jesus delivered His message known today as the Sermon on the Mount. What impacted me most was the sea. I had always thought that the sea Jesus had sent His disciples to cross the night they ran into the enormous storm was an enormous sea. But standing there on the mountainside that day during my first trip to Israel, I could clearly see to the other side of the water.

The story made a lot more sense to me once I knew the truth of the size of the sea, because in order for the disciples to be caught in a storm in the middle of it, the storm had to have come upon them very quickly. Sure, I had read in the Bible that the storm came upon them suddenly, but it wasn't until I actually saw the relatively small size of the sea that I realized the full truth of it. This helped me to understand more clearly how the disciples could have gotten into the boat, even if there were clouds brewing in the distance, and assumed they would make it safely to the other side. Truth has a way of bringing clarity to our understanding.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Let's set the stage on our opening subject by looking at that iconic conversation between Jesus and Pilate found in John 18:33–38. In one of Jesus' last earthly conversations, we read,

Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to

testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”
Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

What is truth? Pilate asked the question of our culture today when he spoke to Jesus on that day. He asked what we hear over and over again in arguments and disputes and especially online: What in the world is truth? And what’s more, who defines it?

Granted, it’s hard to know what truth is if you live in a culture that denies its existence. Pilate didn’t live in a world of absolutes. He was an agnostic. He questioned whether anyone could know truth. But rather than pointing fingers at Pilate, if we open our eyes in our Christian culture today, we can find many people exactly like him.

Far too many believers question whether truth exists. The concept of truth has become one for debate in and of itself. Some lean more toward rationalism, which means that truth is what a person can intellectually perceive or learn. For rationalists, truth is that which your mind can grab in such a way that it makes sense to you.

Other people tend toward pragmatism. Pragmatism defines truth more in line with what works. If something works at that point in time, then it must be truth for that point in time. Still others lean toward world views in which truth is subjective; it’s more about how you feel or what you choose to believe. Truth becomes nothing more than “my truth,” “your truth,” “his truth,” or “her truth.” Relativism and postmodernism call truth according to the way reality is viewed by each person (relativism), or even how each person would prefer to view it (postmodernism).

Essentially, we are living in a world of *isms*, each seeking to define truth according to its own theories, goals, and agendas. But Jesus didn’t mince words when He said in verse 37, “And for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.” Jesus didn’t hold truth up for debate. Jesus told Pilate, as well as anyone else who has ears to hear Him, that He is the one who testifies to the truth.

Truth can be defined as an absolute standard by which reality is measured. Jesus tells us not only that truth exists but also that it is

a powerful force when He states in John 8:32, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Truth is not a made-up concept. Truth exists. Jesus testifies to its existence and says that you and I can come to know truth for ourselves.

This absolute and objective standard by which reality is measured sits outside of you and me. Because of that, truth transcends emotions. How you feel does not determine whether something is true. Last time I checked, one plus one equals two. That truth does not rest on whether you feel that it equals two. It does not depend on whether you wish that it would equal three. The truth is that one plus one always equals two. Regardless of how you feel about something that is true, you need to keep in mind that your feelings don’t determine the truth. Your feelings could be wrong. Truth does not need your emotions to approve it or validate it. One plus one has always equaled two, and it will always equal two. This is because it is a fixed absolute standard by which reality is to be measured. Without this standard, much of what rests on mathematical formulas and programs would come crashing to a halt. Without this standard, the physics of the universe would collapse, as would the world in which we live.

Don’t you want to know when you get on an airplane that the truth of gravity always works as an absolute standard? Doesn’t it give you both confidence and comfort to know that gravity doesn’t deviate based on how people feel? You wouldn’t want to fly if gravity were a negotiable standard that sometimes worked as stated and at other times didn’t. What’s more, you certainly want to know when you get on an airplane that the truth of aerodynamics always works too. Why? Because without it, your plane will crash on takeoff.

Our society is not as opposed to truth as many may make it out to be. Nearly all of us operate on a foundation of truth in many sectors of our lives. Yet when it comes to our own identity and personal character qualities as human beings, that’s where truth seems to be tossed straight out the window.

The climate in our culture reminds me of a conversation I once had with my dad. He was older and was struggling with a sickness. When I asked him if the medication the doctor had prescribed was helping him, he replied, “No.” When I asked why, he told me that he didn’t like that medicine.

“So what did you do, Dad?” I asked him.

“I changed doctors,” he responded.

Too many people today are changing pastors, teachers, news outlets, social media influencers, authors, and even friends when someone says something they don’t like or with which they disagree. Cancel culture has taken on a whole new level in that I have even seen families cancel each other over disagreements on what they believe to be true. What we’ve got today are people bouncing around until they find somebody who will tell them what they want to hear.

A professor told his class one day that they were going to start off the year with his opening philosophical statement, “There are no absolutes.” The professor went on to share that you cannot come to a fixed position on anything at all. One of the students in the professor’s class raised his hand after the professor had finished making his introductory remarks. The student sought to clarify that the professor had just said there are no absolutes.

Once the professor affirmed this to the student, the student paused, then followed up with a question: “Professor, are you absolutely sure?”

While this isn’t a true story, you can imagine the laughter in the room if it were. The professor had postulated an absolute by stating that there are none. You must decide, as every Christian should, where you stand on this subject of truth. Now, I didn’t say you must decide what is truth. Rather, you must decide where you stand on the matter of truth. You must decide if you are going to fall sway to a culture that allows each person to do what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25), or if you are going to recognize that there is an objective standard by which truth has been established. Contaminated and sinful flesh cannot be relied upon to establish

or maintain truth. Sinfulness distorts the truth. Trust rests in the pure perfection of the Creator himself.

Another reason why humanity cannot serve as our own standard for truth is because we are finite. We are limited. We don't know all things about all things. This is why we learn. This is why we study. This is why we change our minds as we discover information.

What's more, that which we learn from isn't always rooted in truth. Sometimes we find out later in our journey that what we were learning and believing to be true were lies, misinformation, or propaganda. By the way, this isn't anything new. This stems from what is known as "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Demons have a school in which most of humanity has enrolled over the years. Satan and his demonic forces seek to trick people with half-truths, partial truths, and all-out lies to deceive and control the population. I would imagine that there is not one person reading this book who has not been duped by the devil at one time or another. Satan is the father of lies, and he's a master at deceptions, particularly those cloaked in partial truths. It's far easier to swallow a lie that's coated in truth. The devil knows that, which is why you'll often find truth mixed in with lies when he sets out to deceive (Genesis 3:1–6; Matthew 4:1–11).

You and I are living in a worldwide web of lies. Everywhere we look and everywhere we go, we are bombarded with secular billboards blasting lies. Sure, they might be nicely painted, dressed up, and sophisticated-sounding lies, but they are still lies. We live in a land of duplicity that has increasingly drifted away from a Judeo-Christian ethic, ultimately washing ashore onto a liar's paradise. The devil is deceitful, so the culture is contaminated.

If you want to discover absolute truth from which kingdom values arise, it must come from an absolute Source. Perfect truth comes only out of a perfect Source. Everything else is guesswork.

And there is only one perfect Source in the universe: God.

This is why many political movements such as socialism, communism, and Marxism seek to keep religion either eradicated or

marginalized. That way they don't have to deal with an absolute. They don't have to deal with God. Leaders in those systems want government to be the arbiter of truth. Even in our own nation, as we shift away from a Judeo-Christian world view, there has been an increased attack on the freedom of religion. This is because without God, there is no truth. God is truth. We read it time and again in Scripture (emphasis added):

- ▶ “Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, **God of truth**” (Psalm 31:5).
- ▶ “Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the **God of truth**; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the **God of truth**; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!” (Isaiah 65:16).
- ▶ “So that by two unchangeable things in which it is **impossible for God to lie**, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18).
- ▶ “May it never be! Rather, let **God be found true**, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, ‘**THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED**’” (Romans 3:4).

When you, or people you know, disagree with God, then you (or they) are wrong. It is impossible for God to be wrong. God is truth. There are two answers to every question—God's answer and everybody else's. And when everybody else disagrees with God, then everybody else is wrong.

There is nothing in God's nature that even makes it possible for Him to lie. He knows everything about everything. And when you know everything about everything, you can't be wrong. When you know the past, present, and future, you can't be wrong. When

you are the one who made it all to begin with, who sustains it all in every moment, you can't be wrong. Jesus declared that as a part of the triune Godhead, He came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

He also boldly stated in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Notice, Jesus did not say that He is *a* way or *a* truth. He said He is *the* way and *the* truth. Jesus is not just one among many. He is *the* standard by which truth is to be measured.

In addition, the Bible calls the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit transfers the truth of God to us so that we can know the way to go and the decisions to make. He serves as our Teacher, Instructor, and Guide.

God is truth.

Jesus is truth.

The Holy Spirit is truth.

Thus, truth is whatever God has declared it to be. Truth is not what the latest opinion poll says. It's not what the surveys say. It's not what the journalists report. It's not what the pundits push. All of that is secondary to what God has spoken on a subject. And, by the way, God has spoken on every subject. You may need to study some to find out what He has to say, but He has spoken.

Truth is never sourced in this world order. Truth is always sourced in God alone. It comes from another realm because He comes from another realm. Truth sits outside of time and space. It also sits outside of our five senses. Truth cannot be determined in human terms because its Originator and Author is not human.

That's why the overarching question you should be asking yourself on every single subject you study or learn about is this: What has God said on the matter? If you ask that on the front end instead of the back, you will save yourself a lot time and consequences.

An airplane pilot needs a control tower because the pilot cannot see everything. There might be something coming up that the pilot needs to know about ahead of time. Or the pilot may need to

be alerted to other planes in the vicinity. That's why a pilot needs something outside of himself or herself—whether that is the control tower or the radar—to guide the

The overarching question you should be asking yourself on every single subject you study or learn about is this: What has God said on the matter?

plane safely through the sky. Similarly, you and I need a control tower. We need something or Someone outside of us—bigger than we are—Someone who can see beyond what we can see to guide us through this life.

God is our guide.

We live in a world that camouflages lies with truth. It's like the man who came home from a fishing trip and showed his wife twenty huge fish. She was very impressed. "You caught all of those?" she asked.

"Oh yeah, I caught them all," he replied, grinning from ear to ear.

The problem was the wife knew her husband, and his fishing skills, too well. So she asked again, "Now, before God, you really did catch those?"

He responded, "Well, yes. I went to the fish market after my trip and told the fishmonger to throw each one to me. So yeah, I caught them!"

Was what he had originally said a fact? Yes, it was a fact. He had caught all twenty fish. But was it true? Not at all.

See, what the world does is it tells you facts, but it does not tell you the truth. Facts without truth are just another way of lying.

The question you and I need to answer for ourselves as we go on this journey of kingdom values is who are we going to look to as the source of truth? Will it be our friends? Will it be the academics? Scholars? Preachers? Social media influencers? Media? Politicians? Moral instincts? Our own feelings, hopes, or desires? Or will it be the true Source: God himself? In order to have shared kingdom values as a culture or society, we will have to look to the

same Source for truth: God. He is the standard by which all else is measured.

I have a family member who lives in England, and when I have gone to visit over the years, one of the sights we usually go see is Big Ben. It towers over the other buildings nearby, offering the precise standard for time. In fact, I've seen men in three-piece suits pull out their pocket watch or check their wristwatch and then look up at Big Ben. What they are doing is looking up to the source of the most accurate time in order to synchronize their own watch with it.

Now, if someone's pocket watch differs from Big Ben, you see them adjust their pocket watch. You don't see them climb up the tower to adjust Big Ben. Big Ben doesn't adjust to anyone. When the people's watches differ, then it is the people's watches that must be adjusted.

Likewise, when it comes to our lives and decisions, God wants us to look to Him as the source of what is true. He doesn't want us to look to what our parents said, what the professors said, our friends, the news, or anything else. When what we think or feel differs from what God says, it is what we think or feel that needs to adjust—not God. God is truth.

As our culture descends into greater chaos with each passing day, it is high time for those of us who claim the name of Jesus Christ to return to the truth. We are not to apologize for being people of the truth. We ought to live with an unwavering commitment to the absolute, divinely authorized objective standard by which reality is to be measured. When you and I do that, when we live as people of the truth, we will bring calm to the chaos that surrounds us.

As kingdom followers of Jesus Christ, we are supposed to make an imprint on earth from the influence of heaven. We are to pray like Jesus, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 KJV). We are to live according to the truth because that is the only way we will fully invite God's healing hope and intervention into the cultural chaos that seeks to engulf us.

There's a story of a ship that had headed down a waterway on a foggy evening. It was a very treacherous waterway, and the captain could barely see anything in front of him. This was in the days before the high-tech instruments captains have now. All the captain could do to navigate the waterway was to look out ahead and steer as best he could.

However, as he looked ahead, there appeared to be a light. The captain assumed the light to be an oncoming boat, so he sent the captain of the other boat a message, "Go three degrees north so that we do not crash."

The message came back to him, "No, you go three degrees south so that there is no crash."

The captain was irritated at the reply, so he sent his own command again. "I told you, go three degrees north so that we do not collide!"

The message came back again, "No, you go three degrees south so there is no collision!"

The captain then tried to pull rank. He said, "I am a captain. I am an officer in the US Navy, and I demand that you go three degrees north!"

The message came back, "I am a lighthouse. I do not move."

Let's stop negotiating with God as if we outrank Him. He is the truth. He does not move. We must adjust to the truth and live as people of truth if we are to avoid the personal chaos, crashes, and collisions so prevalent around us.